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The Clash of Civilizations

The concept of the Clash of Civilizations has no basis in logic. I do not think any clash such as may escalate into a violent confrontation between Islam and the West is at all imminent.

My main contention is that Islam, as a religion, does not pose a challenge to western civilization. Ideologically, it favours peaceful persuasion. Confrontation in Islam is only to fend off aggression and not to attack supposed enemies. Any talk of a violent clash between the two is based wholly on speculation: it will never become a reality. The entire theory rests evidently on the actions taken by certain Muslim extremists, such as those of September 11, 2001. But, it is too far-fetched to term this a clash between civilizations. The events of September 11 and other such events are, in reality, an expression of the frustration of certain over-emotional Muslims who seek to justify their actions under the banner of Islam.

This clash and confrontation which take place in modern times are being perpetrated not by Muslim governments, but by Muslim individuals. This fact likewise refutes the above theory. For war in Islam is a state affair, and that too when it is openly declared to be such. That is why guerrilla or proxy wars are totally abhorrent to Islam, having no sanction in religion. It would be true to say that the clash of the West is with the Muslim terrorist groups and not with Islamic civilization.

What is called 'Islamic terrorism' has nothing to do with Islam. It is, in essence, a political phenomenon of exploitation by certain extremist groups. No movement can be truly Islamic just by applying an Islamic label to it.

There is another, more strategic aspect to this matter. Given America's need for an 'enemy' for its national progress, it will require a real enemy. Such politics cannot succeed on the basis of a powerless imaginary demon. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was cast in the role of the 'real enemy'. This policy might have been effective in that instance. But now America has no real enemy in a practical sense. Therefore, the so-called Cold War philosophy is no longer feasible.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, if America had really required an enemy to serve its national interest, it could have chosen China for this purpose. But, as we all know, America established friendship with China by ceasing all rivalry or hostility. This shows that even if the concept of the presence of an enemy existed in the 20th century, it has outlived its usefulness in the 21st century.

In the post-cold war period, Samuel Huntington wrote a book called "The Clash of Civilizations", in which he claims that such a face-off would escalate to the dimensions of a Third World War. Its message alerts the West to the necessity to prepare for this coming war.

Those who subscribe to Samuel Huntington's logic hold that, on September 11, when a number of over-zealous Muslim youths hijacked four American planes and crashed them into the buildings at New

York and Washington, this was the signal for the beginning of this civilization clash. But I cannot agree with this. To my way of thinking, the incident of September 11 was the isolated and individual reaction of unsound minds. It had nothing to do with a clash of two civilizations. Such a clash would have to be a well-considered action of the two groups, rather than a solitary kamikaze initiative. This may, of course, be sensational news for the media, but it cannot be said to be the sign of a clash of two civilizations.

Those who favour this highly unrealistic conjecture tend to forget the reality that, after the Second World War, there have been many such occasions when the great powers of the world could have used atomic weapons to precipitate a Third World War. But this never happened. America did not drop an atom bomb on Vietnam to win the battle. In Afghanistan, Russia never used atomic weapons to achieve a military victory. Both the super powers accepted defeat and refrained from using atomic armaments, in spite of storing such weapons in great quantities.

The reason is that any such horrendous event takes place only once in human history. An atom bomb too, could be dropped only once, and that has already been done. Hiroshima put a full stop to the use of atomic weapons. It was not a comma, as has been demonstrated by the events of the last sixty years.

Nations possessing these weapons hold that they serve as atomic deterrents against any possible enemy, but the truth is that they have lost their war-deterrent value.

It is an accepted fact that the military use of nuclear weapons is an extremely disastrous boomerang-like game. This is enough to tell us that no atomic war will take place in the world. For a nation can be an enemy of another nation, but it cannot be its own enemy.

Samuel Huntington's book can be summed up thus: the rivalry of these super powers is about to re-emerge in the form of a clash of civilizations. But as a serious proposition this is untenable. Even during the cold war period, the actual clash was one of material interests. Friction between nations in the post cold war period is also due to the same clash of material interests. The military engagement of two civilizations is an unreal concept, for our civilization is based on ideas and values, on the strength of which we may engage in peaceful dialogues – not military confrontations.

The world has, indeed, entered the age of peaceful dialogues. The nuclear deterrent has, in reality, become a war deterrent. The end of the 20th century saw the end of violent confrontations. The 21st century is a new era of human history when man, for the first time is able, in the real sense of the expression, to lead his life in peaceful circumstances.

Finders, not Losers

One can sum up the state of the Muslim community today by saying that they are afflicted by a *persecution complex*. Wherever one looks, one finds Muslims haunted by a feeling of having lost something. Everywhere they are complaining of persecution by other nations, of having had something taken away from them.

Closer scrutiny will tell one the nature of those things that Muslims complain of having lost. One will find that it is political power, government posts, economic resources, social influence and material gain that Muslims feel they have been deprived of. To their mind, they have been done out of these things by other nations of the world.

But, in fact, the Muslims have only themselves to blame for the losses they have incurred. It is their own neglectfulness that has taken them where they are. It is not a question of their having been deprived; it is a question of they themselves having failed to come up to the required mark. Still, what is even more important is that, even along with all these losses, there is still one thing that no one can take away from them. They may have lost worldly wealth, but they are still possessors of great spiritual wealth. The religion of Islam is still with them, fully intact. They still have the final divine scripture, preserved in its original state. They are heirs of a Prophet whose teachings still retain the vitality of the days when he first imparted them to the world. What the Muslims have, then, is greater than what they have lost. How strange that they should feel their losses, mere trifles though they are, and be unaware of the much greater treasure that they still retain.

To say that the path to worldly progress is barred to the Muslims is a highly debatable point. But even if one goes along with the general consensus of Muslim opinion and admits that it is, then still they have the chance to excel in the next world, and success there is better and more lasting than worldly success. Why then should they be so concerned about worldly loss, when they still have access to the much greater gains available in the Hereafter?

Muslims may not be able to find what they seek from men, but they can still find it with God. If they concentrate on serving the divine cause, then they will find that God will provide them, in much greater measure than men could ever do, with all that they seek.

Avoiding Anger

Abu Hurayrah tells of how a man came before the Prophet and asked him of some advice. "Do not be angry," said the Prophet. He asked for further advice, a second and a third time, and each time Prophet repeated the words, "Do not be angry."

Non-Violence and Islam

Non-violence should never be confused with inaction or passivity. Non-violence is action in the full sense of the word. Rather it is more forceful an action than that of violence. It is a fact that non-violent activism is more powerful and effective than violent activism. Non-violent activism is not limited in its sphere. It is a course of action which may be followed in all matters.

Whenever individuals, groups or communities are faced with a problem, one way to solve it is by resorting to violence. The better way is to attempt to solve the problem by peaceful means, avoiding violence and confrontation. Peaceful means may take various forms. In fact, it is the nature of the problem which will determine which of these peaceful methods is applicable to the given situation.

Islam is a religion which teaches non-violence. According to the Qur'an, God does not love *fasad*, violence. What is meant here by *fasad* is clearly expressed in verse 205 of the second chapter. Basically, *fasad* is that action which results in disruption of the social system, causing huge losses in terms of lives and property.

Conversely, we can say with certainty that God loves non-violence. He abhors violent activity being indulged in human society, as a result of which people have to pay the price with their possessions and lives. This is supported by other statements in the Qur'an. For instance, we are told in the Qur'an that peace is one of God's names (59:23). Those who seek to please God are assured by verse 5 of the sixteenth *surah* that they will be guided by Him to "the paths of peace." Paradise, which is the final destination of the society of God's choice, is referred to in the Qur'an as "the home of peace" (89:30), etc.

The entire spirit of the Qur'an is in consonance with this concept. For instance, the Qur'an attaches great importance to patience. In fact, patience is set above all other Islamic virtues with the exceptional promise of reward beyond measure. (39:10)

Patience implies a peaceful response or reaction, whereas impatience implies a violent response. The word *sabr* exactly expresses the notion of non-violence as it is understood in modern times. That patient action is non-violent action has been clearly expressed in the Qur'an. According to one tradition, the Prophet Muhammad observed: God grants to *rifq* (gentleness) what he does not grant to *unf* (violence). (Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, 4/255)

The word *rifq* has been used in this *hadith* as an antithesis to *unf*. These terms convey exactly what is meant by violence and non-violence in present times. This *hadith* clearly indicates the superiority of the non-violent method.

God grants to non-violence what He does not grant to violence is no simple matter. It has very wide and deep implications. It embodies an eternal law of nature. By the very law of nature all bad things are associated with violence, while all good things are associated with non-violence.

Violent activities breed hatred in society, while non-violent activities elicit love. Violence is the way of destruction while non-violence is the way of construction. In an atmosphere of violence, it is enmity which flourishes, while in an atmosphere of non-violence, it is friendship which flourishes. The method of violence gives way to negative values while the method of non-violence is marked by positive values. The method of violence embroils people in problems, while the method of non-violence leads people to the exploiting of opportunities. In short, violence is death, non-violence is life.

Both the Qur'an and the *Hadith* have attached great importance to *jihad*. What is *jihad*? Jihad means struggle, to struggle one's utmost. It must be appreciated at the outset that this word is used for non-violent struggle as opposed to violent struggle. One clear proof of this is the verse of the Qur'an (25:52) which says: Perform *jihad* with this (i.e. the words of the Qur'an) most strenuously.

The Qur'an is not a sword or a gun. It is a book of ideology. In such a case performing *jihad* with the Qur'an would mean an ideological struggle to conquer peoples' hearts and minds through Islam's superior philosophy.

In the light of this verse of the Qur'an, *jihad* in actual fact is another name for peaceful activism or non-violent activism. Where *qital* is violent activism, *jihad* is non-violent activism.

Peaceful Beginning

When the Qur'an began to be revealed, the first verse of the revelation conveyed the injunction: 'Read!' (Iqra) (96:1) By perusing this verse we learn about the initiation of Islamic action. It begins from the point where there is hope of continuing the movement along peaceful lines, and not from that point where there are chances of its being marred by violence.

When the command of '*iqra*' was revealed, there were many options available in Makkah as starting points for a movement. For instance, one possible starting point was to launch a movement to purify the Kabah of the 360 idols installed in it. But, by pursuing such a course, the Islamic movement at that juncture would certainly have had to face a violent reaction from the Quraysh. An alternative starting point could have been an attempt to secure a seat in the Daral-Nadwa (Makkah's Parliament). At that time almost the whole of Arabia was under the direct or indirect influence of the Roman and Sassanid Empires. If the freeing of Arabia from this influence had been made the starting point, this would also have been met with an immediate violent reaction on the part of the Quraysh.

Leaving aside these options, the path followed was that of reading the Qur'an, an activity that could be, with certainty, continued along peaceful lines: no violent reaction would ensue from engaging in such an activity.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, followed this principle throughout his life. His policy was that of adopting non-violent methods in preference to violent methods. It is this policy which was referred to by Aishah, the Prophet's wife, in these words: Whenever the Prophet had to opt for one of two ways; he almost always opted for the easier one. (*Fath al-Bari*, 6/654)

What are the advantages of non-violent activism over violent activism? They are briefly stated as under:

1. According to the Qur'an there are two faculties in every human being which are mutually antipathetic. One is the ego, and the other is the conscience called respectively *nafs ammara* and *nafs lawwama*. (The Qur'an, 12:53; 75:26) What the violent method invariably does is to awaken the ego which necessarily results in a breakdown of social equilibrium. On the other hand, non-violent activism awakens the conscience. From this results an awakening in people of introspection and self-appraisal. And according to the Qur'an, the miraculous outcome of this is that "he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend." (41:34)
2. A great advantage of the non-violent method is that, by following it, no part of one's time is wasted. The opportunities available in any given situation may then be exploited to the fullest extent – as happened after the no-war pact of Hudaibiyya. This peace treaty enabled the energies of the believers to be utilized in peaceful constructive activities instead of being dissipated in a futile armed encounter. One great harm done by violent activism is the breaking of social traditions in the launching of militant movements. Conversely, the great benefit that accrues from non-violent activism is that it can be initiated and prolonged with no damage to tradition.

Generally speaking, attempts to improve or replace existing systems by violent activism are counter-productive. One coup d'état is often the signal for a series of coups and counter-coups. The truly desirable revolution is that which permits gradual and beneficial changes. And this can be achieved only on the basis of non-violence.

Success Through the Non-violent Method

All the great successes of the first phase of Islam as well as the succeeding periods were achieved by non-violent methods. Listed below are some examples of these successes.

1. Of the 23 year period of prophethood, the initial 13 years were spent by the Prophet in Makkah. The Prophet fully adopted the way of pacifism or non-violence during this time. There were many such issues in Makkah at that time which could have been the subject of clash and confrontation. But, sedulously avoiding all such issues, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, strictly limited his sphere to peaceful propagation of the word of God. This resulted in *da'wah* work being performed in full force throughout this period. One of the great gains during these 13 years of *da'wah* work was the entry into the Islamic fold of men of the highest moral calibre, who were responsible for forming the history of Islam, for instance, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali, etc.

2. In Makkah when the Quraysh leaders were set to wage war against the Prophet, even then, instead of opting for the way of reaction and retaliation, what the Prophet did was to secretly migrate to Madinah. Migration, by its very nature, was a clear example of non-violent activism. This peaceful strategy enabled the Prophet and his followers, about two hundred in number, to form a powerful centre of Islam in Madinah. Had they adopted the path of confrontation instead of peaceful migration, the history of Islam might have been buried right there in Makkah shortly after its inception.
3. After the emigration, his antagonists took the unilateral decision to wage war against him. Consequently such bloody encounters as those of Badr and Uhud took place. Then the Prophet made a 10-year peace treaty known in history as Sulh al-Hudaybiyya, by accepting all the conditions of his opponents. This has been called a 'clear victory' in the Qur'an. It is this peace treaty, paving the way for peaceful constructive activities which ultimately made possible the conquest of Makkah and the whole of Arabia.
4. By the end of the pious caliphate, a bloody encounter took place between the Banu Hashim and the Banu Umayyah. This stopped the advance of Islam for a period of ten years. What set this process in motion once again was the voluntary withdrawal of Hasan ibn Ali (d. 50 A.H.) from the battlefield. This was undeniably a practical form of non-violent activism. This peaceful move on the part of Hasan ibn Ali reopened to Islam the locked doors of progress.
5. During the last days of the Abbasid caliphate Mongol tribes attacked the Muslim world and right from Samarkand to Aleppo destroyed the entire Muslim world. The history of Islam had apparently come to a standstill. At that moment the spirit of *da'wah* work was born within the Muslims. As a result, the majority of the Mongols converted to Islam. And that miracle took place which has been described by an orientalist in these words: "The religion of Muslims has conquered where their arms had failed."
6. Islamic history took a crucial turn when, in the years succeeding the pious caliphate, rot had set in the system of the government, and the caliphate had turned into monarchy. At that juncture, many factors emerged which would have resulted in clash and confrontation between the ruler and the ruled. But, following the guidance of the Prophet, the Muslims totally avoided political confrontation. This history beginning with the Umayyad caliphate, continued for several centuries. This was possible because the *tabi'un* (companions of the Prophet's companions) and their succeeding generations, consisting of traditionists, jurists, *'ulema*, sufis and other great religious scholars, all scrupulously avoided any clash or confrontation with the rulers.

It was during this period that on the one hand peaceful *da'wah* work was started in various countries while on the other, disciplines of *hadith*, *fiqh* and other Islamic sciences came into existence on a large scale after a long period of great struggle. All the precious books which adorn our libraries, all the classical literature of Islam are the result of these peaceful activities.

For instance, the Hadith as a source of *Shari'ah* is second only to the Qur'an in Islam. These traditions now exist in the form of printed books. These books are so precious that, without them, it would not have been possible to develop Islam into a complete system as it exists today. During the Umayyads and Abbasids, when the political system had begun to deteriorate, where were these tens of thousands of traditions. All of them existed in the memory of the religious scholars, whose names are mentioned in the books as chains in the link of authorities who have handed this legacy down to us. Had they adopted the principle of violent activism and clashed with the 'oppressive' rulers, they would all have been slaughtered by them and the entire legacy of traditions, instead of finding a place on the pages of books, would have been buried along with them in the graveyards. It is by the miracle of having adopted non-violence instead of violence that the precious sources of traditions have survived in book form and, till today, adorn our libraries.

Political Revolt Unlawful

Despite the blatant perversion in the Muslim rulers after the pious caliphate, the Muslim *ulema* did not lead an insurrection against these corrupt individuals. For about a period of one thousand years they remained detached in this matter and continued to engage all their efforts in non-political fields. This was not a matter of accident but in obedience to the express injunctions of the *shariah*.

As we know, in the books of *Hadith* detailed traditions have been set down in the chapters titled *Kitab al-Fitan*. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, observed in plain words that in later times perversions would set in the rulers, they would become tyrannical and unjust, but that Muslims should not wield their swords against them. They should rather move to the mountains with their goats and camels.

By 'goats and camels' are meant the opportunities in non-political fields which exist, even when the political institutions are corrupted. This injunction given by the Prophet meant that the Muslims should avail of such opportunities by avoiding clash and confrontation in the political field. In short, by ignoring the political problem, they should avail of the non-political opportunities.

These injunctions of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, were so clear that the Muslim *ulema* of later times formed a consensus to make insurrection against the rulers unlawful.

Imam An-Nawawi, commenting upon some traditions as set forth by *Sahih Muslim (Kitab al-Imarah)* observes: "You should not come into conflict with the rulers in matters of their power. Even if you find them going against express Islamic injunctions, you should attempt to make the truth clear to them solely through words of wisdom and advice. So far as revolt and war against them in order to unseat them is concerned, that is totally unlawful according to the consensus of the *ulema*, even when the rulers are *zalim* and *fasiq* (tyrants and corrupt)." (*Sahih Muslim, bi sharh an-Nawawi*, 12/229)

This command of the Prophet, as clearly expressed above, was based on extremely important considerations. In actual fact, in the early phase of Islam (as well as in the later phase) *da'wah* and reform works had to be performed, without which the history of Islam would not have been complete. If the *ulema* of the Muslim community had tried to pose a threat to the political institutions, certainly all this constructive work would have been left undone. That is why the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, expressly prohibited any clash with political institutions. This avoidance of strife guaranteed that non-political constructive work would continue to be performed without any break.

In every society there are always two systems side by side, one political and the other non-political. The latter is established through various non-political institutions. According to the scheme of Islam, non-political institutions established at the social level have always to remain stable. In this way there is a continuing endeavour – even when the political institutions have become corrupt, or keep changing – to keep Islam firmly established at the level of the non-political system.

The Command of War in Islam

It is a fact that certain verses in the Qur'an convey the command to do battle (*qital*) (22:39). What the special circumstances are which justify the issuance of and compliance with this command we learn from our study of the Qur'an.

1. The first point to be noted is that aggression or the launching of an offensive by the believers is not totally forbidden. It is permissible, but with certain provisos. We are clearly commanded in the Qur'an: Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, *but do not be aggressive*. (2:190)
2. Only defensive war is permitted in Islam. Such a war is one in which aggression is committed by some other party so that the believers have to fight in self-defence. Initiating hostility is not permitted for Muslims. The Qur'an says: "They were the first to attack you." (9:13)

Furthermore, even in the case of the offensive being launched by an opposing group, the believers are not supposed to retaliate immediately. Rather in the beginning all efforts are to be made to avert war, and only when avoidance has become impossible is battle to be resorted to inevitably in defence.

3. According to the Qur'an there was one form of war which was time-bound strictly in relation to its purpose. This was to put an end to *fitna*. 'Fight against them until *fitna* is no more.' (2:193) In this verse *fitna* signifies that coercive system which had reached the extremes of religious persecution. In ancient times this coercive political system prevailed all over the world. This absolutism had closed all the doors of progress, both spiritual and material. At that time God commanded the believers to break this coercive system in order to usher in freedom, so that all doors of spiritual and material progress might be opened to man.

This mission was undertaken and brought to a successful conclusion at the internal level within Arabia during the life of the Prophet. Later, during the pious caliphate, the Sassanid and Byzantine empires were dismantled with special divine succour. Consequently, intellectual oppression at the international level was replaced by intellectual freedom.

In this connection those traditions are worth noting which are enshrined in *Sahih al-Bukhari*. When, after the fourth caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, political conflict ensued between Abdullah ibn Zubayr and the Umayyads, Abdullah ibn Umar, one of the senior most companions of the Prophet held himself aloof from the battle. People approached him and, quoting the verse of *qital-al-fitna*, asked him why he was not joining in the battle. Abdullah ibn Umar replied that '*fitna*' as mentioned in the Qur'an did not refer to political infighting, but rather to the religious coercive system, that had already been put to an end by them. (*Fathul Bari*, 8/60)

From this we learn that the war against *fitna* was a war of limited duration, temporary in nature, meant to be engaged in only until its specific purpose had been served.

Invoking the Qur'anic exhortation to do battle against *fitna* in order to validate acts of war which had quite other aims is highly improper. This verse could be cited only if the same state of affairs as existed at the time of its revelation were to prevail once again.

The biographers of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, have put the number of *ghazwa* (battle) at more than 80. This gives the impression that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, in his 23-year prophetic career waged about four battles in a year. But this impression is entirely baseless. The truth is that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, in his entire prophetic life, engaged in war only on three occasions. All the other incidents described as *ghazwat* were in actual fact examples of avoidance of war and not instances of involvement in battle.

For instance, in the books of *Seerah*, the incident of Al-Ahzab is called a *ghazwa* (battle), whereas the truth is that on this occasion the armed tribes of Arabia, twelve thousand in number, reached the borders of Madinah with all intentions of waging war but the Prophet and his companions dug a deep trench between them, thus successfully preventing a battle from taking place. The same is the case with all the other incidents called *ghazwa*. The opponents of the Prophet repeatedly tried to get him embroiled in war, but on all such occasions, he managed to resort to some such strategy as averted the war, thus defusing the situation.

There were only three instances of Muslims really entering the field of battle – Badr, Uhud and Hunayn. But the events tell us that on all these occasions, war had become inevitable, so that the Prophet was compelled to encounter the aggressors in self-defence. Furthermore, these battles lasted only for half a day, each beginning from noon and ending with the setting of the sun. Thus it would be proper to say that the Prophet in his entire life span had actively engaged in war for a total of a day and a half. That is to say, the Prophet had observed the principle of non-violence throughout his 23-year prophetic career, except for one and a half days.

The Islamic method, being based totally on the principle of non-violence, it is unlawful for believers to initiate hostilities. Except in cases where self-defence has become inevitable, the Qur'an in no circumstance gives permission for violence.

The Modern Age and Non-Violence

The greatest problem facing Islam today is, as I see it, that Muslims have almost totally forgotten the Sunnah (Prophet's way) of non-violence. In later times when the Ottoman and Mughal empires disintegrated and problems like that of Palestine have had to be confronted by the faithfuls, Muslims all over the world have fallen a prey to negative reaction on a colossal scale; they have failed to remember that the policy of Islam is not that of violence but of non-violence. It is the result of this deviation, that despite almost a 100-years of bloody wars, Muslims have achieved no positive gain. Rather whatever they already had has been lost by them.

According to Imam Malik, later generations of this *Ummah* (Muslim community) will be able to settle matters at issue in the same way that earlier generations had done, i.e. non-violent methods. Similarly, Muslims of modern times must likewise resort only to non-violent methods. Just as no gain could accrue from violent methods earlier, no gain can accrue from violent methods today.

The state of affairs of Muslims in modern times resembles that which prevailed at the time of Hudaibiyya. Today once again – only on a far larger scale – this *hamiyat al-jahiliya*, prejudices prevailing in pre-Islamic Arabia (48:28) is being displayed by the other party. In the first phase of Islam its solution lay in Muslims sedulously avoiding an equivalent display of prejudice, and in holding firmly *kalima at-taqwa* (the word of piety) they became entitled to the succour of God and were granted a dear victory (48:26).

At the time of the Hudaibiyya peace treaty, the Quraysh, who had secured the leadership of Arabia, were bent on waging war. The Kabah was in their possession. They had expelled the Prophet and his companions from their home-town. They had taken possession of Muslims' homes and other properties, and spared no effort in disseminating negative propaganda against Islam.

Given this state of affairs, there were only two options before the believers. One was to attempt to put an end to tyranny and launch an outright war on the other party in the name of securing their rights. The result of such a move would certainly have been further loss in terms of lives and property.

The second option was to remain patient in the face of immediate loss, be it political or material, and, in spite of the losses avail of whatever opportunities are already available. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and his companions chose this second course. The result was that the entire history of Arabia was revolutionized in just a few years' time.

The same state of affairs is widespread in modern times. Although today Muslims have suffered great losses, political and material, at the hands of other nations, however there still exist a great number of opportunities on a far larger scale. If availed of wisely, we can rewrite the history of Islam in magnificent terms.

The Manifestation of Religion

The modern age is regarded by Muslims as being fraught with problems for Islam. But this is quite contrary to the actual situation. The modern age was in fact is the age of Islam, just as the period of rainfall is the period of farmers. But Muslims, lacking in understanding and awareness have failed to understand this; hence their failure to convert this potential into reality.

What is called *izhar ad-din* in the Qur'an does not refer to something which is temporary in nature. It, in fact, refers to an eternal ideological ascendancy of Islam. It means that in the world of ideology, such a revolution would be brought about as would establish the ideological supremacy of Islam forever. God has already brought it into existence potentially, the believers have only to tap and convert this potential into reality.

The aim of the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions in the seventh century is stated to be *izhar ad-din* in the Qur'an:

'They desire to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths: but Allah seeks only to perfect His light, however much the infidels may abhor it (9:32-33).

Izhar in Arabic means dominance/ ascendancy / supremacy. Here *izhar ad-din* signifies intellectual and ideological dominance, not political dominance. This means that in intellectual and ideological respect, God's religion assumes ascendancy over all other ideologies and religions for all time.

Granting ideological ascendancy to God's religion was no simple matter. It amounted to the writing of history afresh. For although God's religion had always been in a superior position ideologically, it had become obscured by false and misguided ideas. The reason being that in ancient times people were heavily under the influence of superstitious thinking. Their arts and learning in general had all become fettered by superstition and idolatry. This had led to a veil being thrown over true religion, which was the only vehicle for God's truth.

God desired that through the final Prophet an intellectual revolution be brought about which would alter this unfavourable and artificial state of affairs. That human sciences themselves become supporters of the true religion so that according to the established academic standard itself, the religion of monotheism may be made an established religion for the people.

By *izhar ad-din* in this verse is meant this same divine plan being brought into a revolution by the Prophet and his companions. This revolution set a new process in human history. Its purpose was to unravel all the veils of superstition which clouded human judgement, and to lay bare the scientific proofs hidden in nature, so that the truth of monotheism could be brought to light for all humanity. In modern times this revolution has reached its culmination. There were two main aims of this *izhar ad-din*. One, that the system of religious persecution be put to an end, so that a propitious atmosphere could be created for the performance of *da'wah* of the true religion. In ancient times this task could only be

performed in a very adverse atmosphere. The second purpose was to rally all arguments in support of God's true religion, so that all other religions might be shown to be totally lacking in the sound base of arguments. Both these tasks have been performed on a large scale in present times. A brief mention of these is made here.

In ancient times the monarchical system prevailed all over the world. And individualistic system like monarchy could be established by force alone. That is why a coercive system of governance was established by the monarchs. They inevitably crushed any sign of intellectual or religious freedom found among their subjects. This state of affairs posed a permanent obstacle to the general development of human thought or to the spreading of any religious mission. Ultimately this coercive political system was destroyed by the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his Companions.

This abolition of oppressive systems and the freeing of peoples' minds from superstition ushered in an era of freedom and democracy. The effect of this revolution in human history set in motion a process. Later on western nations contributed greatly towards this revolution in human thought. Now this process has culminated in the unparalleled scientific achievements of the present day. In consequence, it has become possible for the task of *da'wah* of truth to be performed in an atmosphere of freedom, which was earlier seriously hampered by the oppressive atmosphere.

Idolatry is another name for a religion of superstitions. In ancient times this *shirk* (idolatry) dominated the minds of the people, having rendered the progress and development of science impossible. The Prophet and his companions made great sacrifices to put an end to this superstitious system. In this way the age of science had its beginnings. The changes wrought by it influenced the course of history over the centuries.

The scientific revolution, which was in actual fact a byproduct of the Islamic revolution, gave us modern communications. The advent of this new age made it possible for the first time in human history for the propagation of Islam to be carried out on a universal scale. According to a *hadith* a time was to come when God's words would enter all the homes in the world. (*Musnad*, Ahmad) This was, indirectly, a prediction of the modern age of communications.

One outcome of the modern scientific revolution is that we have at our disposal a number of new arguments in support of Islamic beliefs. Prior to this revolution the *da'is* of Islam could resort only to traditional arguments in support of the truth of Islam. But today it has become possible to measure up Islamic realities by the highest standards of human knowledge and to establish its authenticity by purely logical arguments.

In ancient times the study of religion could be done only as something sacred and as a matter of dogma. That is why established and unestablished religions had not academically been distinguished from one another. In modern times, owing to the influence of the scientific revolution the study of religions can be done as objectively and as critically as any other matter which comes under scientific scrutiny.

Such critical study has proved, purely academically, that by historical standards, there is only one reliable religion, and that is Islam. All other religions are lacking in this historical credibility. After this intellectual revolution it has become possible to establish the truth of Islam vis-à-vis other religions purely on the basis of human knowledge. That Islam is the only authentic version of divine religion may be fully supported by arguments.

These modern developments in our times have taken Islam to the point of unopposed victory. Now the need of the hour is for Muslims to put an end unilaterally to all violent activities against *mad'u* nations, so that a normal relationship may be allowed to grow between *da'i* and *mad'u*, only then the message of Islam can be conveyed in a normal situation. Now, in the wake of the scientific revolution it has become possible to begin a serious and beneficial dialogue between Islam and non-Islam, the result of which will necessarily be in favour of Islam.

A Great Opportunity

1. Since direct argument cannot be applied to religious beliefs pertaining to the unseen world, these can be supported only by indirect or inferential argument. Educated people had therefore come to believe that religious realities belonged only to the domain of dogma, and that they were not academic or scientific realities. But after the breaking up of the atom the science of logic has undergone a change, and it has been accepted that inferential argument too, in its nature, is as valid and reliable as direct argument. It has subsequently become possible for religious realities to be established on an academic level, i.e. exactly on the same level as material or non-religious theories.
2. In ancient times when man observed the world, it appeared to him that in nature there existed things which were very different from one another. This observation of appearance produced the mentality of idolatry. People began to think that in view of the great diversity of things in existence, their Creator too ought to be more than one. But scientific study has shown that this variety is only that of appearance. Otherwise, all things in nature are different expressions of the same matter. In this way *shirk* (idolatry) lost its intellectual base while monotheism gained the solid support of logic.
3. According to a statement of the Qur'an, the signs of God lay hidden in the earth and the heavens. The study of science has made it manifest to all that the universe is a great storehouse of divine arguments. "We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the Truth." (41:53)
4. After the new discoveries of science, many such things have come to the knowledge of man as have rendered it possible to prove with new arguments those events which are of important religious significance. For instance, carbon-14 dating has made it possible to determine the exact age of the mummy of Rameses II, thereby providing scientific proof for the statement of the Qur'an that the body of Pharaoh was saved by God, so that it might become "a sign to all posterity." (10:92)

(to be continued)

Disadvantage Turned to Advantage

Mahatma Gandhi was very shy by nature. In his book, *“My Experiments with Truth”*, he confesses that it was a long time before he managed to shake off his shyness. While studying in London, he joined a vegetarian society. At one of its meetings he was asked to make a speech. He stood up, but was unable to express himself. Finally he brought himself to voice a few words of thanks and sat down. On another occasion, when he was invited to express his ideas on vegetarian food, he set his thoughts down on paper, but was not even able to read out what he himself had written. Someone, however, taking pity on him, read his discourse for him.

After passing his examination in law from London, he started his practice in Bombay. Here again his shyness was a stumbling block. When he appeared before the judge in his first case, he was so nervous that he could not say anything. He had to tell his client that he would not be able to pursue his case, and that he should choose another lawyer for himself.

But, as Gandhiji writes, this apparent disadvantage turned to his advantage:

“My hesitancy in speech, which was once an annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself a certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escaped my tongue or pen.”

Mahatma Gandhi was well-known for his thoughtful and economical manner of speech. But this outstanding trait only came from another trait which few would consider outstanding. Initially his shyness prevented him from speaking in public; later on it made him thoughtful and economical when he spoke.

No End to Possibilities

The sun was setting in the west over the mountains. Half of the orb had already dipped beneath the ridge. In a few minutes, the whole sun disappeared behind the still-glowing mountain range.

Then darkness began to set in on all sides. The light of the sun was gradually receding, and it seemed as if the whole area would be plunged in pitch darkness. But just then, another light began to ascend. It was the full moon, ascending in the east as the sun set in the west. In a short while the whole scene was lit up again. Not long after the eclipse of the sunlight, the earth was illuminated anew.

“This is a sign of nature,” I thought to myself. “When one possibility ends, another begins. When the sun set, the moon came to give light to the world.”

So, for individuals and nations, there is always hope. If once one falls a victim to the hand of fate, there is no need to be discouraged. There is no cause for despair in this world of God. By grasping fresh opportunities and utilizing them one can arise again. All one has to do is go about one's task in an intelligent manner, and never give up trying.

God has created this world full of wonderful opportunities. Here, when matter perishes, it becomes energy; when darkness comes, a new light emerges from its depths; when one building falls, it leaves a place for another construction. So it is with events in the life of man. From every failure emerges the chance of new success. The same applies to rival nations. If one nation becomes advanced, while another remains backward, this is not the end of the matter. When this happens, another process begins: the advanced nations develop a love of comfort and luxurious living, which is likely, in the long run, to bring about its decadence and downfall while a new spirit of struggle and endeavour rises in the backward people to lead them on to greater heights.

This means that no one need lose heart in this world of God. However uncompromising circumstances may seem, they contain, somewhere or another, the possibility of triumph for man. What one should do is seek out this possibility, and use it to turn one's defeat into victory. Just remember that every dark cloud has a silver lining.

Spirituality in Islam

What is spirituality? – or *rabbaniyat*, to use the Qur’anic term. It is the elevation of the human condition to a plane on which the mind is focused on the higher, non-material realities of a godly existence. The opposite of spirituality is materialism, a course followed all too often in this world. One who takes this course, giving all his attention to worldly things, or to put it another way, who centres his attention on mere appearances, is regarded as being materially-minded. Conversely, one who rises above material things or appearances, who finds his focus of interest in non-material things, is regarded as being spiritual or godly. The latter is one who obeys the injunction of the Qur’an: “Be devoted servants of God” (3:79) or, alternatively, “O people, be godly servants of Allah.”

To understand what constitutes materialism, imagine that you come across a palatial house, or see an attractive car being driven along the street. If a strong desire is kindled within you to have such things in your possession, that is clear indication that materialism is a major motivating factor in your life. One who sees the same things, but remains unaffected by the notions of luxury that they convey, and therefore feels no desire to acquire them, lives in a more rarefied sphere in which materialism plays no part. He sees no attraction in the lesser world of material appearances, being engrossed in the higher realities of the supremely spiritual life. The truly non-material person is never influenced by superficialities: his soul exists at too profound a level of spirituality.

This is true, and without any exaggeration. Those who live for worldly pleasures believe that gratification cannot be had except from material things. But this thinking is due to sheer ignorance. Worldly pleasure being the only thing they have experienced, they imagine that for enjoyment they must depend solely on material things. Had they experienced spiritual pleasure, they would certainly have forgotten material pleasure. The pleasure to be derived from material things is limited in nature and very short lived. Whereas spiritual pleasure may be eternally savoured.

Eating tasty food certainly gives us a sense of enjoyment. But it is only when the experience of eating such food results in an outpouring of thanksgiving to God that our pleasure knows no bounds. Traveling in a modern car is also enjoyable, but the pleasure which comes from a deep perception of reality, – i.e. the apprehension of the indescribably unique power of God as manifested in the world in the form of cars, aeroplanes and all the other modern amenities created for man’s comfort – is far superior to that which one experiences while traveling in a luxurious automobile.

The materially-minded person can find pleasure only in something which he or she actually experiences. But the spiritual person lives on a higher plane. For him, even seeing things in another’s possession occasions an outpouring from the innermost recesses of his heart of his gratefulness to God. Another’s material pleasure transforms itself into a spiritual pleasure for him as well. A materially minded person sees only the creature, while a spiritually-inclined person sees the splendour of the Creator through the

creature. And it is obvious that the spiritual riches accruing from the discovery of the Creator cannot be gained in the discovery of mere objects of creation.

Furthermore, in the spiritual world there is no great difference between comfort and deprivation. What one gains from experiences of material pleasure is of far less value than what one gains from experiences of deprivation. The tears of pain flowing from an aching heart gives far greater satisfaction than the laughter of happiness. The greatest source of pleasure is in the remembrance of God. It is this reality which finds expression in the following verse of the Qur'an: "It is only in the remembrance of God that hearts are comforted." (13:28)

Here comfort means not just the temporary solace to be found in everyday convenience, but the real comfort with its implications of peace of mind that can stem only from God Almighty. Man by nature is an idealistic creature. Anything short of ideal can attract only fitful attention from him, whereas true and lasting comfort can be achieved only through the Perfect Being.

Existing at the level of materialism is like descending into animality. Materialism is, in other words, a form of shallowness. The real man is one who discovers the secret of living on the elevated plane of spirituality. If in materialism there is the pleasure of laughter, in spirituality there is the pleasure of pain. If materialism is to live a life of limitations, spirituality is to live in limitlessness.

The Universe—a Source of Divine Inspiration

The universe has been fashioned by God in a way that it may become a source of spiritual inspiration for man. According to the Qur'an it is the quality of *tawassum* (15:75) that enables one to find inspiration in the universe. What is *tawassum*? It is the ability to understand the signs of nature. That is, to observe the phenomena of the universe in order to draw lessons from them and receive spiritual nourishment from physical events.

Tawassum is, in a sense, a matter of conversion, on a parallel with grass entering the body of the cow and through a natural process being transformed into milk. Similarly, the truly religious person is like a divine industry. He is able to convert physical events into spiritual lessons. He extracts spiritual nourishment from material things.

The distinguishing feature of the wise people described in the Qur'an is that they continuously derive such sustenance from their environment, thus maintaining their intellectual and spiritual well-being. This is elaborated upon in the Qur'an as follows:

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are signs for men of understanding; those that remember God when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying): 'Lord, You have not created these in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the fire, Lord.'" (3:191) *(to be continued)*